

3/27/13

AMERICANS AND GERMANS

The moral status and implications of plans for the final solution of the human question: the end of civilization and its discontents.

In the spring of 1961, and to this day, I regarded SIOP-62, the general nuclear war plan—in the light of the JCS' own estimate that it would kill 500-600 million people—as the most evil plan that had ever existed in the history of humanity.

The preparations to carry it out, and the contingent intentions to do so in a variety of contingencies, I judged to be the most evil human project, preparations and human intentions in all history.

The completed preparations, the operational readiness to implement them within minutes and complete the execution of them within an hour or two-- and the official consideration of even the most murderous of these capabilities as a legitimate "option"-- still continue to this day, as evil as ever, more than twenty years after the end of the Cold War and the dissolution of the Warsaw Pact and the Soviet Union,

Every aspect of the process that culminated in this operational readiness to exterminate half a billion humans (which in reality would now kill closer to six billion) represents a moral catastrophe.

Its roots lay in WWII city bombing (prefigured by "air-war theorists" since the end of WWI:

Japanese bombing of Shanghai,

the German bombing of Guernica and Warsaw and Rotterdam, the London Blitz,

followed quickly by UK terror bombing of German cities at night and USAAF (US Army Air Force) pseudo-"precision" daylight bombing, which was effectively as indiscriminate.

This led to USAAF participation in admittedly indiscriminate city bombing and the firestorms in Hamburg and Dresden, for a combined UK/US killing of 600,000 German civilians.

USAAF fire-bombing of Tokyo (80-120,000 civilian deaths in one night) and 67 other cities, killing 900,000 Japanese civilians.

finally Hiroshima and Nagasaki, killing another 300,00 Japanese civilians (by the end of 1945).

All this was followed inevitably by SAC (Strategic Air Command, part of the newly-independent US Air Force, USAF) postwar planning in which A-bombs were targeted on Soviet cities, first ten or so, then seventy, then hundred;

then the development and testing of the H-bomb and the substitution of H-bombs—1000 times more powerful-- for A-bombs (which had simply replaced 1000-plane conventional attacks) in WWII-type terror-attack plans targeting cities and military targets near cities, including East Europe;

the small H-bomb, with its wide area of destruction compensating for the inaccuracy of early intercontinental missiles, make the ICBM practical,

promoting a supposedly two-sided race (actually, a one-sided American effort, from 1957 to 1962, like the Manhattan Project “racing the Germans” and the one-sided US “bomber race” in the early Fifties) for the ability to disarm the other:

culminating in two systems neither of which could disarm the other in a preemptive strike to the point of surviving as a society but which still tempted each other to preempt on warning, in hopes of lessening the totality of destruction of themselves (though accepting, since 1957, the total destruction of US allies in Europe and neutrals neighboring the SU).

An unrecognized cost of preemption by the US in 1960, or either before (unilaterally) or after 1964 (including Soviet retaliation), was the destruction by nuclear winter of world agriculture, starving the whole of humanity.

The multiplication of warheads by MIRVing ICBMs and SLBMs after 1967 (when the NPT was offered for signature) nailed down this result, which remained unrecognized until 1983, subjected to doubt and denial through the rest of the century, and has resulted in no change in war plans even after it was conclusively confirmed in the last half dozen years.

Each incremental step in this sequence led closer to the completion of the machinery for total destruction of human civilization and possible human extinction that has existed for the last fifty years. The multistage, patient construction over generations—like medieval cathedrals—of two rival Doomsday Machines.

Each step seemed, to its proponents, reasonable and legitimate. But after the London Blitz by the Germans, the deliberate targeting of cities and civilian population by the British and, increasingly, the Americans was kept effectively secret, lest it arouse controversy and moral unease in at least a minority of the British and American publics: even though, in the atmosphere of the World War and later the Cold War it might have had majority support.

Inside the governments there were intense concerns about long-run effects among some doubters at various points: though not at all, so far as the record shows, during one of the most consequential decisions of all in moral/legal terms, the project of firebombing Japanese cities. Those with qualms included nuclear scientists in Chicago before the Trinity test, and later before the crash development and testing of the H-bomb—though in no case did the dissenters take their warning or their struggle to the public, and thus in no case did their dissent have any effect whatever.

A moral threshold had been crossed deliberately, secretly, and, it turned out, irrevocably, by the UK in February 1942, in the decision by the RAF and its civilian superiors to focus targeting of mass night raids on “workers’ housing.” (Working-class neighborhoods were chosen as the targeted aiming points, not because the workers might be employed in war industry, but because their small houses were closer together, so there would be less “wastage” of bombs and so that fires would spread from house to house throughout the neighborhood, incinerating more German families in their beds or home shelters.)

Since Aquinas’ principles of just war and just means in war, the fundamental principle of *jus in bello*, justice in war, had been the immunity from deliberate attack of “innocent” non-combatants, essentially civilians. This was incorporated in the early laws of war, starting with Grotius, and Hague and Geneva Conventions.

But from the end of WWI, certain theorists of airpower saw the massacre of civilians (and their terrorization, demanding surrender from their rulers and making war production impossible) as the key to avoiding the stalemate of trench warfare (and massacre of soldiers, by machine-gun fire and barbed wire). It was inspired by the panic caused by small air attacks on London and continental cities by dirigibles and small aircraft.

Despite its lack of success in causing surrender of England in the London Blitz in 1940-41, it was adopted by the UK in February, 1942. This was not because, at first, because it seemed likely to succeed, but because “there was no other alternative” way for Britain to take the fight to Germany—and argue to the US that the UK was a worthy ally deserving material support--after early daytime raids proved (against predictions of the theorists) too costly in losses to anti-aircraft fire and fighters, and too inaccurate to damage production in factories.

The switch was to night-time raids—when it was hard enough to find a targeted city in the darkness (many cities would be hit “by mistake” in a nighttime raid aimed at one city) and nothing much less than a widespread built-up area could be chosen as the target. To the extent possible, the targeting within the city was, as mentioned above, explicitly against “workers’ housing” (close together, susceptible to spreading fire beyond the houses actually hit by firebombs). This

was denied by the UK government, in Parliament and press, throughout the war. Civilian damage reported by the Germans was described falsely as unsought and incidental to the war resources being targeted.

In its own ideology and attempted practice, the USAAF at first abhorred this “baby killing,” targeting factories, railyards and military targets in daylight with high-level, supposedly “precision” precision bombing with the help of the Norden bombsight. Gradually, post-attack reconnaissance revealed that the actual bomb patterns (in part, subject to the disturbances of wind and German AA and fighter planes) were scarcely less indiscriminate than the UK nighttime terror raids. Moreover, from the beginning USAAF bombers in daytime coordinated their attacks with RAF nighttime raids like those on Hamburg and Dresden which were intended and proceeded to cause intense firestorms, creating updrafts of wind and furnaces in which no civilians could survive.

The RAF practices were increasingly imitated (without US acknowledgement, either internally or to its public) in an incremental process by the USAAF over 1943-44 that culminated in the continuous five-month firebombing campaign against Japanese cities.

This constituted, by any standards, a horribly immoral and illegal project, one of the great war crimes and crimes against humanity of the Twentieth Century: deliberately incinerating and asphyxiating some 600,000 German civilians and 900,000 Japanese civilians (mostly women, children, and the elderly, the younger men being overseas in battle) before the A-bomb was ready for use.

That was a precedent which made the A-bomb decisions entirely unproblematic morally for US decision-makers. It meant nothing more than the continuation by more efficient means (one bomber instead of three hundred) of a process that had been going on without internal resistance for five months, the maximum extermination of Japanese civilians. (The process was unannounced to the American public, but it aroused little curiosity or concern in that public when strong hints leaked out in news stories).

That precedent—dramatically revealed, not commenced, with the atomic bombings, which were described deceptively and accepted by the public as justified by ending the war and saving American lives from an otherwise-inevitable invasion--in turn, unchallenged officially, made the postwar nuclear planning almost inevitable, with its species-threatening implications.

My own feelings when I looked at the nuclear plans and concrete preparations for carrying them out in 1961, and really ever since, were that they represented a human project, by Americans, as evil as the plans and execution of the “final solution of the Jewish question” by the Nazis. Or perhaps, even more evil, by a vast proportion: in light of its scope, the projected body count, promising a hundred Holocausts. (I didn’t know then of the possibility of nuclear winter and possible extinction or near-extinction).

Surely, it seemed to me, the planning and preparation were worse than the planning and preparation for the Holocaust. But, many will object, the latter was “unconditional,”

meant to be carried out “no matter what,” even at cost to the war effort. In contrast, it’s argued, the firebombing of Germany was stopped by German surrender. Likewise, the firebombing of Japan could have been stopped at any time by Japanese surrender: (though hopefully—in the eyes of Truman and Byrnes and Groves—not before there was time to demonstrate the A-bomb).

One program (for the nuclear holocaust), it is argued, is planned and prepared in order to deter, or to “limit damage to the US” or to wreak revenge in case the US is attacked: in hopes neither will be “necessary.” The other, the German Holocaust, was planned in hopes of carrying it out and actually was executed. Surely, it will be argued, this is a different, greater order of evil than conditional planning and preparation.

And yet: the British firebombing in Germany was expected to last, and did last, for years, and the US firebombing in Japan was expected to last, and did last, for many months: and in each case the project was *intended to kill as many humans of a certain category—German and Japanese civilians, largely women and children and the old—as possible*, so long as the war lasted.

It was to continue until their leaders decided to surrender: which, it turned out, was not hastened or determined in either case by the terrorist attacks on civilians. (If Japanese Army leaders had taken power, as they attempted abortively after the Soviet entry, the civilian slaughter by continued US firebombing accompanied by the eight more A-bombs planned for the rest of 1945 would have far exceeded the 1.2 million Japanese civilians killed by August (roughly, the body count of Auschwitz) to levels approaching the Holocaust.

Both the Allied and Nazi projects of extermination were, after all, instrumental to higher ends. In one case, it was to achieve surrender (a failure of the firebombing, in both countries; in the case of the A-bombs, arguably irrelevant to the surrender after the Soviets entered and the US indicated its acceptance of the imperial institution, an argument without end. In the other: the goal of a zone of German occupation “free” of Jews, home for a “purified” German race.

One “end” was traditional and legitimate, the other mad. (Ahab, in Moby Dick: “All my means are sane; my method and my object, mad.”) But the ‘means’ for both were remarkably similar: and equally mad and immoral, themselves. In the latter case, machine-gunning civilians next to trenches or transporting them to be gassed in mobile vans or gas chambers. The American method of burning them alive in their homes or stuck in melting asphalt, boiling them to death in city canals where they fled from the firestorm, and asphyxiating them in shelters, was not obviously morally superior.

It was certainly not more humane in the experience of the victims. And *most* of the billions to be killed by American (or Russian) nuclear weapons would not die instantly, in the flash of a thousand suns, or in a few hours trapped in burning wreckage, as in Tokyo or Dresden; they would die painfully over months, by radiation poisoning or starvation.

A moral/ethical conundrum: How does one compare the morality of a deterrent *threat* and capacity to do unprecedented harm—a threat that may well be carried out under foreseen (or unforeseen) conditions, a possibility of human near-extinction that would not exist as a possibility or a capability except for the continued preparation to carry it out—to a *decision* to do very large though very much *less* large harm unconditionally, which is actually carried out?

I know of no general ethical analysis of such comparisons. But is it really necessary, or important? Does it matter how or whether one decides that ranking, when the scale of actual or projected destruction is at the level of the actual Holocaust (and other civilian casualties of WWII), or the Allied firebombing (scarcely in the historical awareness of most Americans), or the nuclear war *plans* and capabilities of the US and Russia? Isn't it enough to say that all these projects (like certain other organized massacres, as in Rwanda, or Nanking and Japanese strategy in China, or state-induced famines in the Ukraine and China), and the plans and preparations for them, deserve to be seen, and responded to, as evils of the highest degree, without any need to rank them in precise order?

I would say yes to that. *Each* of these massive evils is unique in its details and circumstances-- that is true not only of the Nazi Holocaust—but all of them, it seems to be, deserve to be seen as belonging, together, to a singular, special category, each member of which poses to the highest degree two challenges: first, to *understand* how they came about, to understand how certain humans came to order these campaigns and others came to execute them; second, to recognize an overwhelming, overriding individual and societal *obligation* (not a prediction): "Never again."

Why *it is* important, in my opinion, to put all of these particular horrors in the same, special class--compared to the multitude of other historic and current atrocities--is precisely to avoid prejudging the task of understanding them as resolved by the commonplace American conclusion that, "what was critically necessary to the perpetrators of these massacre was their being German, or Nazi or Japanese fascists, or Bolsheviks, or being quasi-"savages" in Africa, under certain (past) historic circumstances."

That is to say, these events were, in critical part, consequences of *not being like us*, events of a moral nature unlike anything that Americans (or Brits) *could* ever do, or contemplate. And hence, nothing for us to *learn* from, about what "we," advanced democracies like us, might be in danger of doing in the future, or possibly have done in the past.

I fear that familiar conclusion because I think it is wrong, historically and morally. Wrong in a way that conceals from us how our government and society works, what "we" have done and what we are capable of doing in the future. Wrong in a way that will prevent us from averting unprecedented (and irreparable) catastrophe.

Let me make the most controversial, shocking aspect of the categorization above quite explicit. I propose that we reject (as I have long done, with anguish, in my own heart) the recognition of the Nazi Holocaust (*or* Nazi aggression, a distinct project) as being—for all its real uniqueness, and horror—the single, extreme, polar example of “civilized” human capacity for evil, not comparable to anything else in the recent past or near future (unless to the atrocities of non-Western non-truly-civilized foreigners, Soviet or Chinese communists or Japanese aggressors). Not comparable, in particular, to anything in Anglo-American history of the past sixty years.

I *am* saying—with full awareness of how disreputable, how isolating this is in respectable, “reasonable” American discourse—that (1) British and American firebombing *practices*¹ in World War II, and (2) American nuclear war *plans and preparations* ever since 1946 (imitated in detail and scale by the Soviets and now Russians, with a time-lag of about ten years), *are fully morally comparable to the planning and implementation of the Nazi Holocaust.*

As evil, to the fullest, varied meaning of that concept. I don’t intend this as rhetorical exaggeration, or overkill. I want this judgment to be taken seriously, in my full awareness of how much resistance to that I must expect, from people I respect myself.

I am not asserting—it would be absurd—that the Anglo-American *leaders or societies* were “morally equivalent” to the Nazi regime, still less that both were aggressors in WWII. I *am* saying that *these particular policies* should be regarded as morally equivalent, equally evil in the highest degree.

I’m perfectly aware of the many differences between all these policies (and their societies and leadership). I’m saying that these real differences do not compel and should not lead to a different moral evaluation of these particular policies or of those who directed them or carried them out. (Certainly not one that favors our democracies.)

Most Americans, at this moment, will disagree strongly with me on this. I am pressing the importance of making this judgment—and propose in this work to demonstrate my reasons for it—however unpopular or even morally insane it appears, because I think not only the future of my country but the survival of humanity—and much other life--depends on it.

Yes, the body count of the Holocaust (which should be nearly doubled when non-Jewish civilians are added to it) is greater (though not for lack of our willingness or trying to match it) than that of the urban bombing by the Allies (about 1.8 million Germans and

¹Which, I would say, led inevitably to the atomic bombing of Hiroshima and Nagasaki-- given the timing of the Trinity test, culminating the Manhattan Project-- before the Soviet entry into the Pacific war and the modifying of US surrender terms—so I regard them, as Truman and his subordinates did, simply as a continuation of the firebombing policy.

Japanese civilians, deliberately targeted and killed). But that does not strike me as a moral difference, at these scales.

Yes, one is conditional on resistance, the other an unconditional goal of extermination, as I discussed earlier.

Yes, the German industrialization of mass murder by cyanide gas was historically unique. But so was the massive firebombing. Compared to the low-tech gas chambers, the B-29 used over Tokyo was, in fact, the most advanced piece of technology in human history, until that was trumped by the Nagasaki plutonium fission bomb (now the trigger for all our still more advanced thermonuclear weapons).

Yes, one side was the aggressor throughout, the other acting in collective self-defense, pursuing a just cause (though in part—the part I’m talking about—by unjust, criminal means.)²

For me, after half a century of observation and reflection, none of these differences diminishes the moral—and existential—urgency of recognizing the *similarities* in the processes, the policies, the secret reasoning and aims of the leadership and the pliant complicity of their subordinates and their populations. Urgently needed so as to prevent the *recurrence* of comparable horrors *on an inconceivably greater scale*: in large part as a result of our own past and current policies, which reflect the continuation of essentially the same values and priorities of all these parties in the ‘Forties and ever since.

² The project of Nazi aggression—not just to occupy an individual state but to remake the political structure of an entire region of states armed comparably with modern weapons, by military invasion and occupation—was, along with the similar goal of Japanese aggression, unmatched by any others in the twentieth century, or in the nineteenth century since Napoleon. There are few analogies for it in modern history; one has to go back to Alexander, Genghis Khan, Tamurlane, or the numerous earlier empires.

Thus—very regrettably for an American who wants to be heard seriously—there are no modern analogies other than the Nazi or Japanese aggressions by which to approach a historical understanding of the American invasion and occupation of Iraq. The wider ambition of its neo-con planners, expressed in their 1998 Project for a New American Century, was to make this aggression the beginning of restructuring the entire Middle East region, followed by invasion of Syria and air attack on Iran (both, at this moment, still “on the table”).

But that’s another (equally unpopular) analogy altogether, beyond the bounds of this book, involving German *aggression*—a separate and distinguishable evil from its program of extermination, or *crimes against humanity*, our focus here. From my own personal history—in the Marines and as a Cold Warrior—I could not be more unhappy that the analogy of recent U.S. policy to German *aggression*, region-wide *crimes against the peace*, has been forced on me and fellow Americans in the last ten years.

To acknowledge, finally, one more key difference: the Nazi Holocaust (and the Anglo-American firebombing) were programs actually executed, and I'm comparing them here to *plans* and preparations not so far implemented (supposedly 'deterrent'). But I've been moved since 1961 by my knowledge of the absolutely staggering difference in the destruction *contemplated* and prepared for on the basis of our nuclear war plan, the SIOP—explicitly a hundred Holocausts, but actually, we now know in light of climatic and environmental effects, ten times that-- compared to *all* historical experience.

That fantastic scale is what seems to me to put these plans and threats and the all-too-real machinery to carry them out on the same high level of murderousness and immorality as the earlier crimes fully executed; even if one has to reserve one potential level still higher, the actual triggering and implementation of this machinery, by whatever event or reason. The imposition of that *risk* upon the entire world—at whatever probability above absolute *zero* (where it was for the previous hundred thousand years of human existence, before the last fifty)—by creating and permitting the continued *existence* of these Doomsday Machines is the supreme crime against humanity.

Our strategic systems were designed by Americans not merely as a deterrent façade, not ever to be set in motion, but to be triggered in a variety of possible circumstances (including, it was always recognized, a false alarm), with the lesser consequences posed above (ten World War II's). It, and its Russian counterpart, have remained on hair-trigger alert a generation after they were found to threaten, by way of nuclear winter caused by smoke from burning cities, another order of magnitude of destruction, another factor of ten, a hundred World II's. That threatens most of the present human population of the Earth.

Events that set these Doomsday Machines in motion—electronic or human error, a panicked escalation of a regional conflict—would constitute a "final solution of the human question": an end to civilization and its discontents.

For leaders in America and Russia (no other nuclear weapons states have had the aspiration or capability, yet, to match them) to conceive of doing *this*: to decide to make it possible and to carry that out, to threaten it and to be ready operationally and at least to some extent psychologically to do so under circumstances that had a significant probability of occurring (much higher, in retrospect, than most are aware of to this day) despite our efforts to deter and prevent them: such human intentionality and effort does not bear favorable comparison to any policy-making that has ever existed, from the earliest empires and barbarian invasions to the worst of modern times.

Even considered merely as risk-taking--which unlike many earlier projects of massacre has not yet culminated in actual destruction, and (some find this easier to imagine than others) might never do so, over centuries—this effort is and has been always an unbearably reckless, wicked gamble. No more evil (or remotely as dangerous) project has ever existed in human experience, even compared to the worst massacres that have ever occurred.

So I believed, when I was first exposed to Top Secret plans and practices more than sixty years ago, and so I believe now more than ever, with the latest scientific findings on the climatic and environmental consequences of even the smallest nuclear ‘exchanges’ between states that have imitated our nuclear postures on a minute scale, like Pakistan and India.

It may be imprudent, in terms of public acceptance and influence of my argument, to present this particular judgment in my book. Even an associate as close to my general views as anyone I know was resistant to it when I first suggested it to him: that the planning, policy and posture themselves were *as* immoral as the (completed) Holocaust. I should acknowledge that I put it to him that they were even *more* immoral, given the scale of their potential consequences and the complicity of so many in our democracy over so long a time..

Not that our planners and decision-makers, or their Russian counterparts, were worse *persons* than the Nazis: but that what they have *done* and maintained seemed even worse—in its implications and actual consequences and risks for humanity—than what the Nazis actually accomplished (limited by their resources and their defeat).

That’s what I do feel, though perhaps I should hide it. It doesn’t mean to me that Americans who accept this situation are worse than the Germans who went along with what the Nazis were doing. It does mean that we are not different, not better. I have come to believe that. It is a profoundly “un-American” conclusion, though I have always been, and to a more uneasy degree remain, a patriotic American.

[What follows is largely repetitive. All this is an editing of a “rant” I wrote two mornings four years ago, March 20-21, 2009. What follows was written the second day. I’m reviewing and somewhat revising it now—March 24, 2013—as an unburdening of feelings I’ve never dared to express publicly, feelings and silence about them that I suspect have been a factor in my failure to get on with the book as I consciously am determined to do. They clearly separate me from the mass of Americans, and even from the more ‘reasonable’ end of the anti-nuclear and antiwar movement. To express them without the exposition in the body of the book would doom the book to total dismissal; that might be the effect even with limited and careful, and appropriately placed, inclusion in the book. I hope that expressing them now without restraint may free me somewhat, whether or however much they are expressed in the final product.]

Others have been thinking along those lines, of course, over the last ten years, not—*not*-- with reference to the Holocaust—but comparing German aggressions to our actions in Iraq and Afghanistan, and also the Constitutional abuses. Those comparisons, in fact, are exact and inescapable —not “radical, extremist, hysterical” as they are depicted by mainstream critics of antiwar demonstrators-- to anyone knowledgeable about both, not blinded by American exceptionalism.

Some years ago, soon after the invasion of Iraq, the *New Yorker* quoted a child of German immigrants as saying that she had, like others, always condemned her parents' generation of Germans for their passivity, their failure to resist effectively or at all; now she realized, she said, "how helpless they must have felt."

That still leaves the Holocaust without precedent in twentieth-century American experience (since the extermination of the Native Americans in the two preceding centuries). Though the 1.8 million civilians killed by bombing in WWII—and the perhaps more than one million Iraqi civilians killed—are each in the ball-park, compared, say, to Auschwitz. However, few Americans are aware of either of these body counts.

But the secret planning of which I became aware in 1959-61-- if carried out—would exceed any of these earlier massacres in its projected death-toll, to an almost unimaginable degree. It would exceed all of them put together in history, including those of Stalin, Mao, Pol Pot, Suharto, the Armenians, Rwandans, and former Yugoslavs *together*, along with those of Tamerlane, Genghis Khan, the Romans, Assyrians, Sumerians, *all the massacres of innocents in human experience put together*.

That followed directly from a related comparison, likewise unknown to most Americans. The first test of a *single* thermonuclear bomb, the American Mike test in 1954, *released more explosive power than that in all the wars in human history together*. The explosive power of fifteen million tons (fifteen "megatons") of high explosive, compared, for example, to the two million tons dropped by the United States in World War II. (There was another two million tons of artillery shells. I haven't seen a total for all combatants, or for World War I or earlier wars, but they wouldn't add up to fifteen megatons).

SIOP-62 scheduled the dropping of *thousands* of thermonuclear weapons on the "Sino-Soviet Bloc," including every city in the Soviet Union and China. Most were not of the yield of the Mike test or larger, perhaps only a few dozen of those, but very many, perhaps most, including those carried by single-pilot fighter-bombers, had the explosive power of half a World War II, a little over a million tons equivalent.

When I read these plans in 1960-61, I was already more knowledgeable than nearly anyone on ways they could be triggered by accident, unauthorized action, or delegated authority far below the level of the president. I knew of our commitment to execute them in case of a serious blockade or takeover of Berlin or a major incursion into West Germany. This NATO planning, *in which all our European partners participated*, was itself, I already thought, the most reckless, irresponsible planning in history. But not until I realized in 1961 how conscious the JCS (and Eisenhower) were of the potential scale of our "response," did it appear to be unequivocally condemnable as evil.

The shock of that told me more than that "we" had done something very, very bad. It bore on what people like us would do in the future. I could have said, what they/we "might" do, even "might well" do. But my reaction was stronger than that. I had the dark epiphany that people who had made these plans, formed these intentions (yes, "only

conditional” intentions: but even so), and carried out these preparations could not be trusted not to destroy civilization in the not-distant future.

More than that: people like that, people like my then-colleagues in Washington and Santa Monica, *would* do that eventually. Before very long. Recall, this was early 1961. I still believed, if not entirely in the full missile gap favoring the Soviets—thanks to Andy Marshall’s predictions in 1960—in a sizeable Soviet missile force, larger than ours. I assumed the balance of terror was delicate, as my mentor Albert Wohlstetter put it, with two large and vulnerable forces tempting each other to act on false alarms or to preempt. The Berlin crisis was at hand. I thought a two-sided nuclear war was highly likely within a decade or so, if not sooner.³

In short: when I read the JCS estimate in 1961 I felt I had learned how the world, our world, would end. When I held the JSCP in my hands—one of the only civilians ever then to do so—I was reading the death warrant for civilization.

I continue to believe that what I learned about humans that day. The JCS’ conscious and unashamed awareness of what they had wrought (and what Eisenhower had approved, however reluctantly)—demonstrated what I have often said since, that this is a species of unprecedented, unique danger to itself and all other “advanced” species—primates, vertebrates, birds, fish—none of which probably, as a result, have long to live, even in historical time. It is not a species to trust with thermonuclear weapons.

³ I had not had any impulse to take out TIAA/CREF retirement insurance at RAND—RAND generously paid half the annuity--since I had believed since my first summer at RAND in 1958 that there was only a very small chance that I would live to enjoy it. (Alain Enthoven and I—the same age, 27—may have been the only two employees at RAND who didn’t make that investment in 1959, and for the same reasons; though Alain was smart enough to initiate it after 1962, when the missile gap was debunked. I never did get around to doing so, which is why I have no retirement income now.)

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then the development and testing of the H-bomb and the substitution of H-bombs—1000 times more powerful-- for A-bombs (which had simply replaced 1000-plane conventional attacks) in WWII-type terror-attack plans targeting cities and military targets near cities, including East Europe;

the small H-bomb, with its wide area of destruction compensating for the inaccuracy of early intercontinental missiles, make the ICBM practical,

promoting a supposedly two-sided race (actually, a one-sided American effort, from 1957 to 1962, like the Manhattan Project “racing the Germans” and the one-sided US “bomber race” in the early Fifties) for the ability to disarm the other:

culminating in two systems neither of which could disarm the other in a preemptive strike to the point of surviving as a society but which still tempted each other to preempt on warning, in hopes of lessening the totality of destruction of themselves (though accepting, since 1957, the total destruction of US allies in Europe and neutrals neighboring the SU).

An unrecognized cost of preemption by the US in 1960, or either before (unilaterally) or after 1964 (including Soviet retaliation), was the destruction by nuclear winter of world agriculture, starving the whole of humanity.

The multiplication of warheads by MIRVing ICBMs and SLBMs after 1967 (when the NPT was offered for signature) nailed down this result, which remained unrecognized until 1983, subjected to doubt and denial through the rest of the century, and has resulted in no change in war plans even after it was conclusively confirmed in the last half dozen years.

Each incremental step in this sequence led closer to the completion of the machinery for total destruction of human civilization and possible human extinction that has existed for the last fifty years. The multistage, patient construction over generations—like medieval cathedrals—of two rival Doomsday Machines.

Each step seemed, to its proponents, reasonable and legitimate. But after the London Blitz by the Germans, the deliberate targeting of cities and civilian population by the British and, increasingly, the Americans was kept effectively secret, lest it arouse controversy and moral unease in at least a minority of the British and American publics: even though, in the atmosphere of the World War and later the Cold War it might have had majority support.

Inside the governments there were intense concerns about long-run effects among some doubters at various points: though not at all, so far as the record shows, during one of the most consequential decisions of all in moral/legal terms, the project of firebombing Japanese cities. Those with qualms included nuclear scientists in Chicago before the Trinity test, and later before the crash development and testing of the H-bomb—though in no case did the dissenters take their warning or their struggle to the public, and thus in no case did their dissent have any effect whatever.

A moral threshold had been crossed deliberately, secretly, and, it turned out, irrevocably, by the UK in February 1942, in the decision by the RAF and its civilian superiors to focus targeting of mass night raids on “workers’ housing.” (Working-class neighborhoods were chosen as the targeted aiming points, not because the workers might be employed in war industry, but because their small houses were closer together, so there would be less “wastage” of bombs and so that fires would spread from house to house throughout the neighborhood, incinerating more German families in their beds or home shelters.)

Since Aquinas’ principles of just war and just means in war, the fundamental principle of *jus in bello*, justice in war, had been the immunity from deliberate attack of “innocent” non-combatants, essentially civilians. This was incorporated in the early laws of war, starting with Grotius, and Hague and Geneva Conventions.

But from the end of WWI, certain theorists of airpower saw the massacre of civilians (and their terrorization, demanding surrender from their rulers and making war production impossible) as the key to avoiding the stalemate of trench warfare (and massacre of soldiers, by machine-gun fire and barbed wire). It was inspired by the panic caused by small air attacks on London and continental cities by dirigibles and small aircraft.

Despite its lack of success in causing surrender of England in the London Blitz in 1940-41, it was adopted by the UK in February, 1942. This was not because, at first, because it seemed likely to succeed, but because “there was no other alternative” way for Britain to take the fight to Germany—and argue to the US that the UK was a worthy ally deserving material support--after early daytime raids proved (against predictions of the theorists) too costly in losses to anti-aircraft fire and fighters, and too inaccurate to damage production in factories.

The switch was to night-time raids—when it was hard enough to find a targeted city in the darkness (many cities would be hit “by mistake” in a nighttime raid aimed at one city) and nothing much less than a widespread built-up area could be chosen as the target. To the extent possible, the targeting within the city was, as mentioned above, explicitly against ‘workers’ housing’ (close together, susceptible to spreading fire beyond the houses actually hit by firebombs). This

was denied by the UK government, in Parliament and press, throughout the war. Civilian damage reported by the Germans was described falsely as unsought and incidental to the war resources being targeted.

In its own ideology and attempted practice, the USAAF at first abhorred this “baby killing,” targeting factories, railyards and military targets in daylight with high-level, supposedly “precision” precision bombing with the help of the Norden bombsight. Gradually, post-attack reconnaissance revealed that the actual bomb patterns (in part, subject to the disturbances of wind and German AA and fighter planes) were scarcely less indiscriminate than the UK nighttime terror raids. Moreover, from the beginning USAAF bombers in daytime coordinated their attacks with RAF nighttime raids like those on Hamburg and Dresden which were intended and proceeded to cause intense firestorms, creating updrafts of wind and furnaces in which no civilians could survive.

The RAF practices were increasingly imitated (without US acknowledgement, either internally or to its public) in an incremental process by the USAAF over 1943-44 that culminated in the continuous five-month firebombing campaign against Japanese cities.

This constituted, by any standards, a horribly immoral and illegal project, one of the great war crimes and crimes against humanity of the Twentieth Century: deliberately incinerating and asphyxiating some 600,000 German civilians and 900,000 Japanese civilians (mostly women, children, and the elderly, the younger men being overseas in battle) before the A-bomb was ready for use.

That was a precedent which made the A-bomb decisions entirely unproblematic morally for US decision-makers. It meant nothing more than the continuation by more efficient means (one bomber instead of three hundred) of a process that had been going on without internal resistance for five months, the maximum extermination of Japanese civilians. (The process was unannounced to the American public, but it aroused little curiosity or concern in that public when strong hints leaked out in news stories).

That precedent—dramatically revealed, not commenced, with the atomic bombings, which were described deceptively and accepted by the public as justified by ending the war and saving American lives from an otherwise-inevitable invasion--in turn, unchallenged officially, made the postwar nuclear planning almost inevitable, with its species-threatening implications.

My own feelings when I looked at the nuclear plans and concrete preparations for carrying them out in 1961, and really ever since, were that they represented a human project, by Americans, as evil as the plans and execution of the “final solution of the Jewish question” by the Nazis. Or perhaps, even more evil, by a vast proportion: in light of its scope, the projected body count, promising a hundred Holocausts. (I didn’t know then of the possibility of nuclear winter and possible extinction or near-extinction).

Surely, it seemed to me, the planning and preparation were worse than the planning and preparation for the Holocaust. But, many will object, the latter was “unconditional,”

meant to be carried out “no matter what,” even at cost to the war effort. In contrast, it’s argued, the firebombing of Germany was stopped by German surrender. Likewise, the firebombing of Japan could have been stopped at any time by Japanese surrender: (though hopefully—in the eyes of Truman and Byrnes and Groves--not before there was time to demonstrate the A-bomb).

One program (for the nuclear holocaust), it is argued, is planned and prepared in order to deter, or to “limit damage to the US” or to wreak revenge in case the US is attacked: in hopes neither will be “necessary.” The other, the German Holocaust, was planned in hopes of carrying it out and actually was executed. Surely, it will be argued, this is a different, greater order of evil than conditional planning and preparation.

And yet: the British firebombing in Germany was expected to last, and did last, for years, and the US firebombing in Japan was expected to last, and did last, for many months: and in each case the project was *intended to kill as many humans of a certain category—German and Japanese civilians, largely women and children and the old—as possible*, so long as the war lasted.

It was to continue until their leaders decided to surrender: which, it turned out, was not hastened or determined in either case by the terrorist attacks on civilians. (If Japanese Army leaders had taken power, as they attempted abortively after the Soviet entry, the civilian slaughter by continued US firebombing accompanied by the eight more A-bombs planned for the rest of 1945 would have far exceeded the 1.2 million Japanese civilians killed by August (roughly, the body count of Auschwitz) to levels approaching the Holocaust.

Both the Allied and Nazi projects of extermination were, after all, instrumental to higher ends. In one case, it was to achieve surrender (a failure of the firebombing, in both countries; in the case of the A-bombs, arguably irrelevant to the surrender after the Soviets entered and the US indicated its acceptance of the imperial institution, an argument without end. In the other: the goal of a zone of German occupation “free” of Jews, home for a “purified” German race.

One “end” was traditional and legitimate, the other mad. (Ahab, in *Moby Dick*: “All my means are sane; my method and my object, mad.”) But the ‘means’ for both were remarkably similar: and equally mad and immoral, themselves. In the latter case, machine-gunning civilians next to trenches or transporting them to be gassed in mobile vans or gas chambers. The American method of burning them alive in their homes or stuck in melting asphalt, boiling them to death in city canals where they fled from the firestorm, and asphyxiating them in shelters, was not obviously morally superior.

It was certainly not more humane in the experience of the victims. And *most* of the billions to be killed by American (or Russian) nuclear weapons would not die instantly, in the flash of a thousand suns, or in a few hours trapped in burning wreckage, as in Tokyo or Dresden; they would die painfully over months, by radiation poisoning or starvation.

A moral/ethical conundrum: How does one compare the morality of a deterrent *threat* and capacity to do unprecedented harm—a threat that may well be carried out under foreseen (or unforeseen) conditions, a possibility of human near-extinction that would not exist as a possibility or a capability except for the continued preparation to carry it out—to a *decision* to do very large though very much *less* large harm unconditionally, which is actually carried out?

I know of no general ethical analysis of such comparisons. But is it really necessary, or important? Does it matter how or whether one decides that ranking, when the scale of actual or projected destruction is at the level of the actual Holocaust (and other civilian casualties of WWII), or the Allied firebombing (scarcely in the historical awareness of most Americans), or the nuclear war *plans* and capabilities of the US and Russia? Isn't it enough to say that all these projects (like certain other organized massacres, as in Rwanda, or Nanking and Japanese strategy in China, or state-induced famines in the Ukraine and China), and the plans and preparations for them, deserve to be seen, and responded to, as evils of the highest degree, without any need to rank them in precise order?

I would say yes to that. *Each* of these massive evils is unique in its details and circumstances-- that is true not only of the Nazi Holocaust—but all of them, it seems to be, deserve to be seen as belonging, together, to a singular, special category, each member of which poses to the highest degree two challenges: first, to *understand* how they came about, to understand how certain humans came to order these campaigns and others came to execute them; second, to recognize an overwhelming, overriding individual and societal *obligation* (not a prediction): "Never again."

Why *it is* important, in my opinion, to put all of these particular horrors in the same, special class--compared to the multitude of other historic and current atrocities--is precisely to avoid prejudging the task of understanding them as resolved by the commonplace American conclusion that, "what was critically necessary to the perpetrators of these massacre was their being German, or Nazi or Japanese fascists, or Bolsheviks, or being quasi-"savages" in Africa, under certain (past) historic circumstances."

That is to say, these events were, in critical part, consequences of *not being like us*, events of a moral nature unlike anything that Americans (or Brits) *could* ever do, or contemplate. And hence, nothing for us to *learn* from, about what "we," advanced democracies like us, might be in danger of doing in the future, or possibly have done in the past.

I fear that familiar conclusion because I think it is wrong, historically and morally. Wrong in a way that conceals from us how our government and society works, what "we" have done and what we are capable of doing in the future. Wrong in a way that will prevent us from averting unprecedented (and irreparable) catastrophe.

Let me make the most controversial, shocking aspect of the categorization above quite explicit. I propose that we reject (as I have long done, with anguish, in my own heart) the recognition of the Nazi Holocaust (*or* Nazi aggression, a distinct project) as being—for all its real uniqueness, and horror—the single, extreme, polar example of “civilized” human capacity for evil, not comparable to anything else in the recent past or near future (unless to the atrocities of non-Western non-truly-civilized foreigners, Soviet or Chinese communists or Japanese aggressors). Not comparable, in particular, to anything in Anglo-American history of the past sixty years.

I *am* saying—with full awareness of how disreputable, how isolating this is in respectable, “reasonable” American discourse—that (1) British and American firebombing *practices*¹ in World War II, and (2) American nuclear war *plans and preparations* ever since 1946 (imitated in detail and scale by the Soviets and now Russians, with a time-lag of about ten years), *are fully morally comparable to the planning and implementation of the Nazi Holocaust.*

As evil, to the fullest, varied meaning of that concept. I don’t intend this as rhetorical exaggeration, or overkill. I want this judgment to be taken seriously, in my full awareness of how much resistance to that I must expect, from people I respect myself.

I am not asserting—it would be absurd—that the Anglo-American *leaders or societies* were “morally equivalent” to the Nazi regime, still less that both were aggressors in WWII. I *am* saying that *these particular policies* should be regarded as morally equivalent, equally evil in the highest degree.

I’m perfectly aware of the many differences between all these policies (and their societies and leadership). I’m saying that these real differences do not compel and should not lead to a different moral evaluation of these particular policies or of those who directed them or carried them out. (Certainly not one that favors our democracies.)

Most Americans, at this moment, will disagree strongly with me on this. I am pressing the importance of making this judgment—and propose in this work to demonstrate my reasons for it—however unpopular or even morally insane it appears, because I think not only the future of my country but the survival of humanity—and much other life--depends on it.

Yes, the body count of the Holocaust (which should be nearly doubled when non-Jewish civilians are added to it) is greater (though not for lack of our willingness or trying to match it) than that of the urban bombing by the Allies (about 1.8 million Germans and

¹Which, I would say, led inevitably to the atomic bombing of Hiroshima and Nagasaki-- given the timing of the Trinity test, culminating the Manhattan Project-- before the Soviet entry into the Pacific war and the modifying of US surrender terms—so I regard them, as Truman and his subordinates did, simply as a continuation of the firebombing policy.

Japanese civilians, deliberately targeted and killed). But that does not strike me as a moral difference, at these scales.

Yes, one is conditional on resistance, the other an unconditional goal of extermination, as I discussed earlier.

Yes, the German industrialization of mass murder by cyanide gas was historically unique. But so was the massive firebombing. Compared to the low-tech gas chambers, the B-29 used over Tokyo was, in fact, the most advanced piece of technology in human history, until that was trumped by the Nagasaki plutonium fission bomb (now the trigger for all our still more advanced thermonuclear weapons).

Yes, one side was the aggressor throughout, the other acting in collective self-defense, pursuing a just cause (though in part—the part I’m talking about--by unjust, criminal means.)²

For me, after half a century of observation and reflection, none of these differences diminishes the moral—and existential—urgency of recognizing the *similarities* in the processes, the policies, the secret reasoning and aims of the leadership and the pliant complicity of their subordinates and their populations. Urgently needed so as to prevent the *recurrence* of comparable horrors *on an inconceivably greater scale*: in large part as a result of our own past and current policies, which reflect the continuation of essentially the same values and priorities of all these parties in the ‘Forties and ever since.

² The project of Nazi aggression—not just to occupy an individual state but to remake the political structure of an entire region of states armed comparably with modern weapons, by military invasion and occupation—was, along with the similar goal of Japanese aggression, unmatched by any others in the twentieth century, or in the nineteenth century since Napoleon. There are few analogies for it in modern history; one has to go back to Alexander, Genghis Khan, Tamurlane, or the numerous earlier empires.

Thus—very regrettably for an American who wants to be heard seriously—there are no modern analogies other than the Nazi or Japanese aggressions by which to approach a historical understanding of the American invasion and occupation of Iraq. The wider ambition of its neo-con planners, expressed in their 1998 Project for a New American Century, was to make this aggression the beginning of restructuring the entire Middle East region, followed by invasion of Syria and air attack on Iran (both, at this moment, still “on the table”).

But that’s another (equally unpopular) analogy altogether, beyond the bounds of this book, involving German *aggression*—a separate and distinguishable evil from its program of extermination, or *crimes against humanity*, our focus here. From my own personal history—in the Marines and as a Cold Warrior—I could not be more unhappy that the analogy of recent U.S. policy to German *aggression*, region-wide *crimes against the peace*, has been forced on me and fellow Americans in the last ten years.

To acknowledge, finally, one more key difference: the Nazi Holocaust (and the Anglo-American firebombing) were programs actually executed, and I'm comparing them here to *plans* and preparations not so far implemented (supposedly 'deterrent'). But I've been moved since 1961 by my knowledge of the absolutely staggering difference in the destruction *contemplated* and prepared for on the basis of our nuclear war plan, the SIOP—explicitly a hundred Holocausts, but actually, we now know in light of climatic and environmental effects, ten times that-- compared to *all* historical experience.

That fantastic scale is what seems to me to put these plans and threats and the all-too-real machinery to carry them out on the same high level of murderousness and immorality as the earlier crimes fully executed; even if one has to reserve one potential level still higher, the actual triggering and implementation of this machinery, by whatever event or reason. The imposition of that *risk* upon the entire world—at whatever probability above absolute *zero* (where it was for the previous hundred thousand years of human existence, before the last fifty)—by creating and permitting the continued *existence* of these Doomsday Machines is the supreme crime against humanity.

Our strategic systems were designed by Americans not merely as a deterrent façade, not ever to be set in motion, but to be triggered in a variety of possible circumstances (including, it was always recognized, a false alarm), with the lesser consequences posed above (ten World War II's). It, and its Russian counterpart, have remained on hair-trigger alert a generation after they were found to threaten, by way of nuclear winter caused by smoke from burning cities, another order of magnitude of destruction, another factor of ten, a hundred World II's. That threatens most of the present human population of the Earth.

Events that set these Doomsday Machines in motion—electronic or human error, a panicked escalation of a regional conflict—would constitute a "final solution of the human question": an end to civilization and its discontents.

For leaders in America and Russia (no other nuclear weapons states have had the aspiration or capability, yet, to match them) to conceive of doing *this*: to decide to make it possible and to carry that out, to threaten it and to be ready operationally and at least to some extent psychologically to do so under circumstances that had a significant probability of occurring (much higher, in retrospect, than most are aware of to this day) despite our efforts to deter and prevent them: such human intentionality and effort does not bear favorable comparison to any policy-making that has ever existed, from the earliest empires and barbarian invasions to the worst of modern times.

Even considered merely as risk-taking--which unlike many earlier projects of massacre has not yet culminated in actual destruction, and (some find this easier to imagine than others) might never do so, over centuries—this effort is and has been always an unbearably reckless, wicked gamble. No more evil (or remotely as dangerous) project has ever existed in human experience, even compared to the worst massacres that have ever occurred.

So I believed, when I was first exposed to Top Secret plans and practices more than sixty years ago, and so I believe now more than ever, with the latest scientific findings on the climatic and environmental consequences of even the smallest nuclear ‘exchanges’ between states that have imitated our nuclear postures on a minute scale, like Pakistan and India.

It may be imprudent, in terms of public acceptance and influence of my argument, to present this particular judgment in my book. Even an associate as close to my general views as anyone I know was resistant to it when I first suggested it to him: that the planning, policy and posture themselves were *as* immoral as the (completed) Holocaust. I should acknowledge that I put it to him that they were even *more* immoral, given the scale of their potential consequences and the complicity of so many in our democracy over so long a time..

Not that our planners and decision-makers, or their Russian counterparts, were worse *persons* than the Nazis: but that what they have *done* and maintained seemed even worse—in its implications and actual consequences and risks for humanity—than what the Nazis actually accomplished (limited by their resources and their defeat).

That’s what I do feel, though perhaps I should hide it. It doesn’t mean to me that Americans who accept this situation are worse than the Germans who went along with what the Nazis were doing. It does mean that we are not different, not better. I have come to believe that. It is a profoundly “un-American” conclusion, though I have always been, and to a more uneasy degree remain, a patriotic American.

[What follows is largely repetitive. All this is an editing of a “rant” I wrote two mornings four years ago, March 20-21, 2009. What follows was written the second day. I’m reviewing and somewhat revising it now—March 24, 2013—as an unburdening of feelings I’ve never dared to express publicly, feelings and silence about them that I suspect have been a factor in my failure to get on with the book as I consciously am determined to do. They clearly separate me from the mass of Americans, and even from the more ‘reasonable’ end of the anti-nuclear and antiwar movement. To express them without the exposition in the body of the book would doom the book to total dismissal; that might be the effect even with limited and careful, and appropriately placed, inclusion in the book. I hope that expressing them now without restraint may free me somewhat, whether or however much they are expressed in the final product.]

Others have been thinking along those lines, of course, over the last ten years, not—*not*--with reference to the Holocaust—but comparing German aggressions to our actions in Iraq and Afghanistan, and also the Constitutional abuses. Those comparisons, in fact, are exact and inescapable —not “radical, extremist, hysterical” as they are depicted by mainstream critics of antiwar demonstrators-- to anyone knowledgeable about both, not blinded by American exceptionalism.

Some years ago, soon after the invasion of Iraq, the *New Yorker* quoted a child of German immigrants as saying that she had, like others, always condemned her parents' generation of Germans for their passivity, their failure to resist effectively or at all; now she realized, she said, "how helpless they must have felt."

That still leaves the Holocaust without precedent in twentieth-century American experience (since the extermination of the Native Americans in the two preceding centuries). Though the 1.8 million civilians killed by bombing in WWII—and the perhaps more than one million Iraqi civilians killed—are each in the ball-park, compared, say, to Auschwitz. However, few Americans are aware of either of these body counts.

But the secret planning of which I became aware in 1959-61-- if carried out—would exceed any of these earlier massacres in its projected death-toll, to an almost unimaginable degree. It would exceed all of them put together in history, including those of Stalin, Mao, Pol Pot, Suharto, the Armenians, Rwandans, and former Yugoslavs *together*, along with those of Tamerlane, Genghis Khan, the Romans, Assyrians, Sumerians, *all the massacres of innocents in human experience put together*.

That followed directly from a related comparison, likewise unknown to most Americans. The first test of a *single* thermonuclear bomb, the American Mike test in 1954, *released more explosive power than that in all the wars in human history together*. The explosive power of fifteen million tons (fifteen "megatons") of high explosive, compared, for example, to the two million tons dropped by the United States in World War II. (There was another two million tons of artillery shells. I haven't seen a total for all combatants, or for World War I or earlier wars, but they wouldn't add up to fifteen megatons).

SIOP-62 scheduled the dropping of *thousands* of thermonuclear weapons on the "Sino-Soviet Bloc," including every city in the Soviet Union and China. Most were not of the yield of the Mike test or larger, perhaps only a few dozen of those, but very many, perhaps most, including those carried by single-pilot fighter-bombers, had the explosive power of half a World War II, a little over a million tons equivalent.

When I read these plans in 1960-61, I was already more knowledgeable than nearly anyone on ways they could be triggered by accident, unauthorized action, or delegated authority far below the level of the president. I knew of our commitment to execute them in case of a serious blockade or takeover of Berlin or a major incursion into West Germany. This NATO planning, *in which all our European partners participated*, was itself, I already thought, the most reckless, irresponsible planning in history. But not until I realized in 1961 how conscious the JCS (and Eisenhower) were of the potential scale of our "response," did it appear to be unequivocally condemnable as evil.

The shock of that told me more than that "we" had done something very, very bad. It bore on what people like us would do in the future. I could have said, what they/we "might" do, even "might well" do. But my reaction was stronger than that. I had the dark epiphany that people who had made these plans, formed these intentions (yes, "only

conditional” intentions: but even so), and carried out these preparations could not be trusted not to destroy civilization in the not-distant future.

More than that: people like that, people like my then-colleagues in Washington and Santa Monica, *would* do that eventually. Before very long. Recall, this was early 1961. I still believed, if not entirely in the full missile gap favoring the Soviets—thanks to Andy Marshall’s predictions in 1960—in a sizeable Soviet missile force, larger than ours. I assumed the balance of terror was delicate, as my mentor Albert Wohlstetter put it, with two large and vulnerable forces tempting each other to act on false alarms or to preempt. The Berlin crisis was at hand. I thought a two-sided nuclear war was highly likely within a decade or so, if not sooner.³

In short: when I read the JCS estimate in 1961 I felt I had learned how the world, our world, would end. When I held the JSCP in my hands—one of the only civilians ever then to do so—I was reading the death warrant for civilization.

I continue to believe that what I learned about humans that day. The JCS’ conscious and unashamed awareness of what they had wrought (and what Eisenhower had approved, however reluctantly)—demonstrated what I have often said since, that this is a species of unprecedented, unique danger to itself and all other “advanced” species—primates, vertebrates, birds, fish—none of which probably, as a result, have long to live, even in historical time. It is not a species to trust with thermonuclear weapons.

³ I had not had any impulse to take out TIAA/CREF retirement insurance at RAND—RAND generously paid half the annuity--since I had believed since my first summer at RAND in 1958 that there was only a very small chance that I would live to enjoy it. (Alain Enthoven and I—the same age, 27—may have been the only two employees at RAND who didn’t make that investment in 1959, and for the same reasons; though Alain was smart enough to initiate it after 1962, when the missile gap was debunked. I never did get around to doing so, which is why I have no retirement income now.)